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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7286  
INFO RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2731  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7595  
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3103  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 9222  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6720  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1900  
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0938  
RUEHMRE/AMCONSUL MARSEILLE 1734  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3658  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: CHASTENED JOURNALISTS ADD TO ELECTION DAY CYNICISM

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Tunisian journalist and human rights activist Sihem Bensedrine was denied entry at Algiers airport on April 4 after being invited by the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH) to participate in a program monitoring the media in the run-up to the April 9 presidential election. Le Monde journalist Florence Beauge, meanwhile, did not receive accreditation to cover the election after she published a series of articles critical of the Algerian regime. Only about 100 journalists, roughly half of them Algerian, have been credentialled to cover Algeria's April 9 presidential elections - a figure one Algerian journalist dismissed as "nothing." Observers ascribe the profound apathy among Algerian journalists and those of their foreign colleagues who are allowed to enter the country to a belief that the outcome of the election is a foregone conclusion. END SUMMARY.

RETURN TO SENDER  
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¶2. (C) Sihem Bensedrine, a Tunisian journalist and human rights activist, arrived at Houari Boumediene airport in Algiers on April 4 only to be denied entry and turned around. According to the LADDH, Bensedrine, the founder of the independent Tunisian radio station Kalima, had been invited to participate in an LADDH-sponsored media monitoring program. Mostefa Bouchachi, head of the LADDH, told us on April 6 that the ban "was totally unjustified" and added that "it was an absolute shame for Algeria to act in such a way." Human rights lawyer Amine Sidhoum told us that the incident was "an insult to the world," coming in the middle of a presidential campaign when "authorities should do their best to present a positive image of Algeria."

¶3. (C) Le Monde journalist Florence Beauge, an expert on Algeria, did not receive accreditation to cover the election following several articles critical of the Algerian regime. Beauge recently told us this was "the first time I got a firm 'niet' as an answer." Le Monde recently published a contribution from the controversial Algerian writer Boualem Sansal, who described the state of despair in Algeria and vilified "Bouteflika and his clan." The February issue of Le Monde Diplomatique devoted two pages to Algeria, including a report entitled "Algeria no longer believes in its promises." The article described at length the regression of individual freedoms under Bouteflika.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The two incidents, coupled with the general lack of enthusiasm among Algerian journalists, further

illustrate a presidential election whose outcome the Algerian government is intent on managing. Roughly 100 journalists, half of them Algerian, have been credentialled to cover the election. About 300 foreign journalists sought to cover the last presidential election in 2004. Algerian journalist Arezki Ait Larbi, correspondent for Le Figaro and Ouest-France, told us recently that he was not surprised that the Algerian elections were generating little interest among those foreign journalists. "If the campaign is not of any interest to Algerians," he said, "why should it interest the French, especially in the middle of an economic crisis?" Meanwhile, Lyes Menacer of French-language daily Le Soir d'Algerie found the number of accredited journalists embarrassing, "especially when 300 journalists are accredited to cover a soccer match between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona." Menacer and Ait Larbi commented that journalists are deeply cynical about a presidential election which they believe has already been decided, and a process they feel lacks transparency and public participation.

PEARCE